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THE TIMES AND THE
MAN, by Dr. Thomas Ed-
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Speaking Service, Ameri-
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President, Society of the
Sons of the Revolution in
the State of Illinois



An address delivered at
the joint celebration of
the Patriotic Societies of
the District of Columbia
on February 22, 1922, in
commemoration of the
one hundred and ninetieth
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day of George Washington

PUBLISHED FOR THE SOCIETY
WASHINGTON

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NOTE

This patriotic address, delivered at the Eighth Joint Celebration of the Sons of the Revolution in the District of Columbia, the District of Columbia Daughters of the American Revolution, and the District of Columbia Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, held on the one hundred and ninetieth anniversary of the birthday of George Washington, in the auditorium of the Central High School in Washington, D. C., on February 22, 1922, has been printed through the courtesy of its author for the benefit of the members of the Society of the Sons of the Revolution.

The Joint Committee on Arrangements, under whose auspices this celebration was held, were as follows:

Brig.-Gen. George Richards, Chairman; Doctor Marcus Benjamin, Mr. Charles P. Light, of the Sons of the Revolution in the District of Columbia.

Colonel Frederick C. Bryan, Mr. Albert D. Spangler, Mr. William A. Miller, Secretary, of the District of Columbia Society Sons of the American Revolution.

Mrs. Francis A. St. Clair, Mrs. G. Wallace W. Hanger, Mrs. Howard L. Hodgkins, of the District of Columbia Daughters of the American Revolution.

The Times and The Man

By THOMAS EDWARD GREEN

*Director Speaking Service, American Red Cross;
and Past President, Society of the Sons of
the Revolution in the State of Illinois.*

We are to think somewhat for a time in this presence of the thing that we call history. Is it the regular unfolding of the chapters in a consecutive story, or is it merely a haphazard collection of episodes? Is it the orderly working out of a manifest purpose, or is it dominated by contending and confusing forces, that, like the wild winds of the ocean, play across the surface of the years? Granting even the utmost dimension to the time of man's existence on this globe, has there been a steady march of progress, or has man's story been but the ebb and flow of attainment dominated merely by the chance that tosses dice with circumstance?

Is there a Vast Intelligence that dominates the Universe, or is this thing of which we are a part but a mad welter of eternal forces, insensate and inexorable?

Are things as they are because they are, or because they were meant to be? Is the golden age in the past, or do we still look forward with confidence to better things?

It is against the background of such questionings as these that we come to consider for a little time a Great Man—admittedly the greatest man in all our history—admittedly one of the greatest men in all the ages of recorded time.

Carlyle says that "what man has accomplished in the world is at bottom the history of the Great Men who have worked there."

Philosophers are continually speculating as to the ultimate source of human greatness—whether it lies in the individual character, that by dint of masterful and clearly-defined purpose, makes use of things and plays them with steady hands as points in his accomplishment; or whether he himself is the creature of circumstance, molded and dominated by environment, builded into his stature of excellence by the things that surround him—by the forces that oppose him—by the breaks of fortune that fall to his hand.

Is genius an endowment—the rare gift of fortune to those whom it isolates and endows, or is it the survival of the fittest—the result of steadfast purpose molded by inflexible will—the supreme accomplishment of one who with deliberate intent “hitches his wagon to a star”?

We are face to face with the mystery of the ages. Our confidence rests in our faith that “through the ages one eternal purpose runs”—that somehow and somewhere in this mighty tangle that makes up human life “there is a power not ourselves that makes for ‘righteousness.’”

Mr. H. G. Wells in his much read “Outlines of History” says—“human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe.” Shall we call this education, the result of human experience—condensed, crystalized into a prevailing dominant thought or purpose—what we call “The Times”—the atmosphere of a given age?

And shall we say that when this common consciousness of mankind—struggling, contending, reaching forward, comes to where it would achieve—to where it waits for the leadership that shall mold and guide it into lasting accomplishment—that when the Times call for their Great Man, and when in answer there steps forth from the secret places of God he on whom the hand of Destiny has fallen—then we have a Turning Point in Human History toward which myriad lines of influence have converged, and out of which goes forth the dynamic that is to write a new chapter in human progress.

Of such fashion were George Washington and his Times—on such a foundation of faith in the eternal order of things rest our veneration of today—and our abiding confidence in the America of tomorrow.

It is well that we think sometimes of the beginnings from which we came and of the men whose brains and hearts and hands fashioned the structure of our nation. They were not merely rebels, rising against what was to them unjust and intolerable oppression. They were the builders of a new sort of community into the world. The modern States of Europe have been evolved, institution by institution, slowly and planlessly out of preceding things. The United States were planned and made. They were the deliberate result of a determination to construct a government directly suited to the needs and the aims of the governed.

The American Revolution and the government which followed were distinct episodes in the race between education and catastrophe.

For one hundred and fifty years there had been building up on this Western Continent a race of men whose roots had been planted in the wilderness where nature had taught them her grandest lessons. Removed from the artificial glitter of courts, they had sensed in the midst of broad immensity the freedom that is the birthright of humanity. Nature had taught them the great fundamental virtues. She had taught them simplicity, from their necessities. She had taught them self-reliance, by the dangers that menaced them. She had taught them industry, as they turned and tilled a reluctant soil. Best of all she had taught them independence—the love of liberty was in the very air they breathed, and so there had developed here a race of men the like of which the world had never known—men whose indomitable spirit became—

“The energy sublime,
Of a century burst full blossomed
On the thorny stem of time.”

They were entirely different from the ordinary factors in ethnic development. They were not the half-tried experiments of a half-barbarous age. They had planted broad and deep the foundations of learning and had made possible a broad and practical education. Through the years of the Eighteenth Century, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and William and Mary had been planting in the minds of men the fundamentals of expanding freedom.

And so as the Times swept up to their climax they were dominated by a group of men who in thought, in culture, in civilization—who in everything that makes for the advancement of the world were the equal if not the superiors of the best product of the best age that the world had ever known.

Here were men who had at their finger ends the well-digested knowledge of the centuries. Here were men who knew the Pandects of Justinian—the beginnings of English jurisprudence—the story of the struggle for representative government in all the ages of the past. Nay—more than that, these men were the very embodiment of broad culture; their daily speech was in the polished accents of Elizabethan English; they spoke the same language that Shakespeare wrote; that Bacon thought—the same speech that you find in

your King James Bible, or that rolls its matchless sonority through the syllables of your English Prayer Book.

And when in answer to their call their Great Man came, and their aspirations took shape and struggled into form, with their first articulate speech these nation-makers created a Constitution, enacted edicts, declared laws that not alone, mark you, were the best the world then possessed, but that after one hundred and fifty years of expanding, orbiting time, still stand today with the necessity of scarcely a verbal correction or emendation—confessedly the most magnificent monument of statecraft and erudition in the possession of the world.

In the story of civilization this world has nothing that for perspicacity, for far-seeing vision, for consummate idealism can compare with that most majestic of state papers—the American Declaration of Independence.

And lest we lose ourselves in the dangerous atmosphere of self-congratulation, I quote William E. Gladstone, certainly no biased critic when he says—

“The American Constitution is so far as I can see the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time by the brain and the purpose of man.”

Such then were the Times and such the men that were watching for their Leader—for their Great Man who should mold and guide these titanic forces into permanent organization and stable life—and in answer to their call he came.

In recounting the deeds of great men we are mostly accustomed to tell of early disadvantages and hardships. We say most often, that “in spite of lowly birth, of poverty and of grinding toil, they rose to greatness.” Perhaps in view of the world’s experience we should reverse that judgment and should say that in most cases it has been by the blessing of lowly birth, grim poverty, earnest endeavor and indomitable will—that in spite of handicap and hindrances, they rose to greatness.

For the Leader of a free people seeking liberty of action, and enunciating great and democratic principles of equality and opportunity, no man was ever born apparently less suited to his duty than George Washington.

He was handicapped by family, by wealth, by religion, and by the social institutions of which he was a part. He had no need of honor and distinction, for they were all his. He had no

need of wealth, for the broad acres of Virginia had made him independent. He had little need of effort, for scores of slaves were at his bidding. He belonged to a State Church whose temporal head was the King of England and whose fundamental tenet was obedience to the powers ordained of Heaven. He was the last man, as we judge men, to be chosen to the position in which he rose to such supreme heights that he belongs—not alone to us, but to all the world. Like Moses at the Court of Egypt, he had been training for a work and for a mighty mission that he dreamed not of—and when the hour came and the Times called, he was ready for the work that destiny had laid upon him.

Where the most eloquent lips of the world have marshalled their proudest periods in tribute and praise, what need is there that we attempt a new tribute? Where shall we seek the secret of his unique greatness?

It was not in superior erudition, for he was surrounded by men, many of whom excelled him in education and intellectual culture. It was not perhaps in surpassing military genius, although critics have always varied as to the rank to be assigned him among the great captains of the world. It was something different and distinct from all these. It was the ineffable, indescribable type of moral excellence—a grandeur of character—a sublimity of soul that made him such a unique place among men that Lord Brougham should have written—

“Till time shall be no more, a test of progress which our race has made in wisdom and virtue will be derived from the veneration paid to the immortal name of WASHINGTON.”

Men sometimes fail in the atmosphere of close acquaintanceship, but Thomas Jefferson said of him—“His integrity was most pure—his justice the most inflexible I have ever known. No motives of interest, of friendship or of hatred were able to bias his decision. He was in every sense of the word a wise, a good and a great man.”

And but as yesterday Lord Bryce, revered and sincerely mourned in our America as in England overseas, said:

“Washington stands alone and unapproachable, like a snow peak rising above its fellows in the clear air of the morning, with a dignity, a constancy and purity which have made him the ideal type of civic virtue to succeeding generations.”

As a General, he led his brave though impoverished army to success, and so gained our priceless heritage of freedom. As a private citizen he persuaded and guided his distracted countrymen to a lasting Union. As President he directed an inexperienced Government along lines of integrity, economy and patriotism, and left for the years to come a legacy of unselfishness and of devotion that may well form our highest ideal.

Guizot, the great French historian, says of him—

“He did the two greatest things in statesmanship a man can have the privilege of attempting—he maintained by peace that independence of his country which he had acquired by war. He founded a free Government in the name of the principles of order, and by re-establishing their sway. Of all great men he was the most virtuous and the most fortunate. In this world God has no higher favors to bestow.”

And it was Abraham Lincoln, he who spoke few words and weighed them well when he uttered them, who said—

“To add brightness to the sun or glory to the name of Washington is alike impossible. Let none attempt it. In simple awe pronounce the name, and in its naked, deathless splendor leave it shining on.”

I have said in the beginning that when the Times call for their Great Man destiny answers to their cry. Shall we say then as we close, that the need of the Times is not the advent of a Great Man in an unready world, but that the challenge of the day is that the mass of men shall hold themselves ready for leadership and for obedience to his challenge when he comes.

Through all the ages prophets have spoken to unhearing ears, and high ideals, proclaimed to a selfish and an ignoble generation, have been pearls cast before swine. The world is struggling now toward another turning point where either humanity, caught by the consciousness of a mighty vision, shall sweep onward into fresh achievement and wider happiness; or, clutched in the grip of catastrophe, shall go hurtling down into the abyss.

We are calling for our Great Man. We in America, who coming last and suffering least in the mighty cataclysm that selfishness had wrought in the world, still find ourselves adrift upon a storm-tossed sea of confusion and uncertainty. It is my thought that when the Times are right our Great Man will come—that when as a people

our minds are so enlightened, our conscience is so secure, our ideals, and our purposes are so clean and pure, that we can stand unflinching in the presence of the White Light that gleams around the Infinite, and say—"We are ready in devotion, in service and in sacrifice"; then the bell of destiny will strike, the Man and the Times will meet in the Providence of God, and this Nation "of the people, by the people and for the people" shall leap forward in that supreme development that Washington saw in times of old.

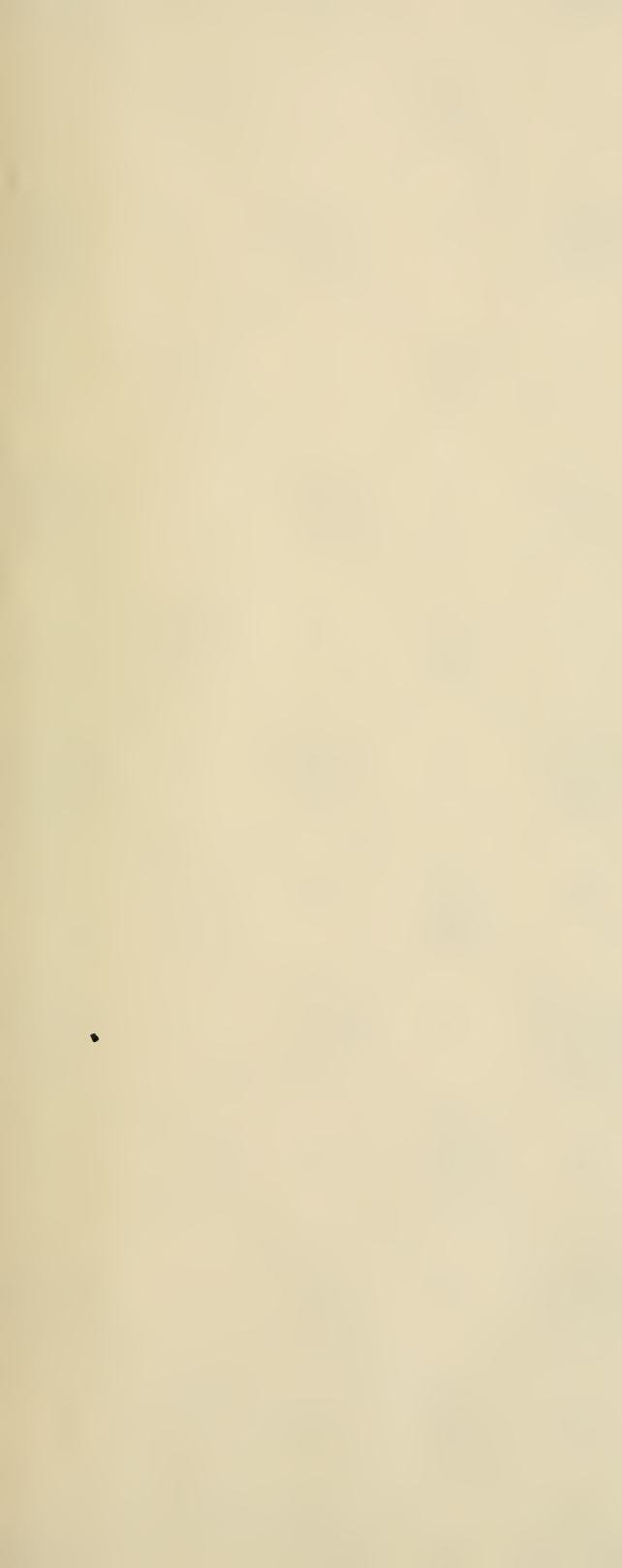
This month of February is a holy time in our commemoration. It brings the anniversaries of two of those great souls "of whom the world was not worthy," who having done all and dared all, stand in the clear light of Eternal Honor. Washington, the founder, the sage—he who laid broad and deep the fundamentals of our nation—and Lincoln, the Emancipator, the preserver—firm in his faith, steadfast in his purpose "to do the right as God gives us to see the right."

And because of them and of their trust, let there come to us an abiding faith in this nation founded by destiny, guided by God, entrusted with concerns and influence today of which they little dreamed. As we revere their memory, may we absorb some measure of their virtue; may we catch the spirit of their sacrifice and of their devotion; and may our lives be pledged anew to the Service of the Nation that we love—

"Sail on, sail on, O Ship of State!
Sail on, O Union, strong and great!
Humanity with all its fears,
With all its hopes for future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate!
Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears,
Our faith triumphant o'er our fears,
Are all with thee—are all with thee!"

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